

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BUENOS 01406 251215Z
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SUBJECT: ARGENTINE REACTION TO TODMAN HUMAN RIGHTS SPEECH

REF: STATE 045684

SUMMARY: ASSISTANT SECRETARY TODMAN'S
LATIN AMERICA POLICY SPEECH RECEIVED WIDE
COVERAGE AND EDITORIAL COMMENT IN THE LOCAL
PRESS, WITH INITIAL EMPHASIS PLACED ON TEN
POINTS CAUTIONING US RESPONSE ON HUMAN RIGHTS.
SUBSEQUENT DISTRIBUTION AND PUBLICATION OF
FULL TEXT LARGELY CLEARED UP MISCONCEPTIONS
THAT SPEECH MEANT OTHER THAN FIRM COMMITMENT
TO EXISTING HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY. HUMAN RIGHTS
GROUPS WERE DISTRESSED THAT SPEECH COULD BE
AND WAS USED TO SUGGEST US BACKING AWAY ON
HUMAN RIGHTS. END SUMMARY

1. ASSISTANT SECRETARY TODMAN'S LATIN AMERICA POLICY
SPEECH RECEIVED CONSIDERABLE COVERAGE AND EDITORIAL
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PAGE 02 BUENOS 01406 251215Z

COMMENT IN THE LOCAL PRESS AND WAS WIDELY DEBATED AMONG
INTERESTED ARGENTINES AS SIGNALING AN "AWAKENING US
APPRECIATION OF LATIN AMERICA" AND BEGINNING OF "A NEW,
MORE REALISTIC US FOREIGN POLICY." SOME OBSERVERS ALSO
REFERRED TO IT AS AN INDICATION OF A CHANGE--IN EMPHASIS,
IF NOT CONTENT--IN THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION'S HUMAN
RIGHTS POLICY; OTHERS SAID IT ILLUSTRATED THE EXISTENCE

OF CONFLICT WITHIN THE ADMINISTRATION OVER THE POLICY.

2. THE PRESS PLACED EARLY EMPHASIS ON THE TEN POINT "DECALOGUE" CAUTIONING US SENSITIVITY IN CARRYING OUT THE HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY. LA OPINION ON FEBRUARY 15. RAN THE ANSA WIRE SERVICE REPORT EXCERPTING THE "DECALOGUE" ON PAGE ONE, ACCOMPANIED BY LOCAL COMMENTARY DESCRIBING THE SPEECH AS "SEVERE CRITICISM OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS." ELSEWHERE AS WELL, THAT SEGMENT OF THE SPEECH WAS EXPLOITED BY THE MEDIA AND GOVERNMENT SYMPATHIZERS TO SUPPORT THEIR VARIOUS POINTS OF VIEW REGARDING US-ARGENTINE DIFFERENCES OVER HUMAN RIGHTS.

3. THE NEXT DAY, HOWEVER, LA OPINION PUBLISHED THE USIS-PROVIDED TEXT IN FULL WITH A SIDEBAR COMMENTARY THAT TODMAN'S TEN POINTS REPRESENTED "NOT A SHIFT BUT A REFINING OF THE SAME CARTER POLICY." THREE ARGENTINE POLITICAL FIGURES INTERVIEWED BY LA OPINION IN THE SAME ISSUE INTERPRETED THE SPEECH AS "REAFFIRMING THE SUBSTANTIAL ASPECTS OF THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS," WHILE DEMONSTRATING A "MORE BALANCED VIEW OF LATIN AMERICAN REALITY" AND "STRENGTHENING THE ESSENCE OF THE NON-INTERVENTION PRINCIPLE." LA PRENSA ON FEBRUARY 18 CITED TODMAN'S STATEMENT THAT THE "NATURE OF US RELATIONS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES WILL DEPEND ON THEIR HANDLING OF HUMAN RIGHTS", WHICH IT WENT ON TO CRITICIZE AS "INADMISSABLE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 BUENOS 01406 251215Z

INTERFERENCE BY A POWERFUL NATION IN THE INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS OF A LESS POWERFUL BUT EQUALLY SOVEREIGN STATE."

4. THE BUENOS AIRES HERALD, WHICH RAN ALMOST THE FULL SPEECH TEXT OF FEBRUARY 24 (HEADLINE: "AN UNSWERVING COMMITMENT TO PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS.") DESCRIBED AS WISE TODMAN'S "APPEAL FOR GREATER MODERATION, REALISM AND BALANCE" IN AN EDITORIAL FEBRUARY 19. THE HERALD SAID THAT "UNFORTUNATELY, MANY PRO-RIGHTS ACTIVISTS, BOTH IN THE US ADMINISTRATION AND OUTSIDE IT, ARE MORE CONCERNED WITH ASSERTING THEMSELVES, ADVANCING THEIR CAREERS OR EXPRESSING THEIR HOSTILITY TOWARDS POLITICAL IDEAS THEY DON'T LIKE THAN WITH THE FATE OF THE LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN JAILS AND TORTURE-CHAMBERS OF FOREIGN DICTATORSHIPS." WHILE THE US HAS WON A "REPUTATION FOR ITSELF AMONG THE VICTIMS, REAL OR IMAGINED, OF GOVERNMENT ACTION,..., INFLUENCE WITH GOVERNMENTS IS, IN REALISTIC TERMS, USUALLY WORTH FAR MORE THAN MOMENTARY POPULARITY WITH ANY SECTORS OF PUBLIC OPINION," COMMENTED THE HERALD. IT WENT ON TO SUGGEST THAT "HELPING THE FORCES FOR MODERATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS THAT EXIST WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT WILL HELP SAVE LIVES, LESSEN HUMAN SUFFERING AND EXTEND REAL--AND

NOT MERELY RHETORICAL--RESPECT FOR HUMAN DIGNITY.
WEAKENING THESE FORCES BY INDISCRIMINATE DIATRIBES AGAINST
ENTIRE GOVERNMENTS OR EVEN COUNTRIES IS BOUND TO BE
COUNTERPRODUCTIVE."

5. OTHER EMBASSY CONTACTS ALSO EXPRESSED INTEREST AND/OR
CONCERN WITH THE SPEECH AS IT WAS TREATED HERE. THE
AMBASSADORS OF THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY COUNTRIES
ASKED THE AMBASSADOR LAST WEEK WHETHER THE SPEECH WAS TO
SIGNAL A CHANGE IN US POLICY. THEY WERE APPRISED OF THE
SPEECH'S BASIC THEME AND PROVIDED FULL TEXTS.

6. HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS FOCUSED ON THE "TEN POINTS" AND
QUESTIONED WHETHER THE SPEECH MEANT THE US WAS BACKING OFF
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PAGE 04 BUENOS 01406 251215Z

ON HUMAN RIGHTS. A GROUP CALLED RELATIVES OF MISSING AND
DETAINED PERSONS ASKED EMBASSY POL OFFICER WHETHER THE US
GOVERNMENT WAS "PLAYING GAMES" WITH THEM OVER HUMAN RIGHTS.
THE MOTHERS OF PLAZA DE MAYO GROUP ALSO VOICED CONSIDERABLE
DISTRESS. THE EMBOFF POINTED OUT THAT THE SPEECH STRONGLY
REAFFIRMED THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION'S COMMITMENT TO
HUMAN RIGHTS AND DISTRIBUTED THE FULL TEXT TO INTERESTED
GROUPS. A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PERMANENT ASSEMBLY
COMMENTED THAT IT WAS UNFORTUNATE THAT THE SPEECH COULD
BE USED BY THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED PRESS TO SUGGEST
THE US WAS WEAKENING ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND SAID HE
CONSIDERED THAT THE WAY IT WAS TREATED LOCALLY WAS
A "NET LOSS" FOR THOSE CONCERNED WITH HUMAN RIGHTS AND SAID HE
CONSIDERED THAT THE WAY IT WAS TREATED LOCALLY WAS
A "NET LOSS" FOR THOSE CONCERNED WITH HUMAN RIGHTS
IN ARGENTINA.

7. PUBLICATION AND DISTRUBUTION BY USIS OF THE
ENTIRE TEXT OF THE TODMAN SPEECH, SUBSEQUENT TO
INITIAL REPORTS, SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT HOWEVER
AND ACTED AGAINST ANY FURTHER DELIBERATE MISUSE OF
THE SPEECH THROUGH SELECTED QUOTATIONS.
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